

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWER ON BLM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRAVEL CHARGE CARD MANDATORY USE POLICY**

**1. Q - Why is use of the travel charge card mandatory?**

A - The Travel and Transportation Reform Act, Public Law 105-264, dated October 19, 1998, contains provisions that require use of the travel charge card. Subsequent General Services Administration (GSA) regulations and the Department of the Interior (DOI) guidance have provided additional information related to the mandatory use policy.

In addition, use of the travel charge card provides you with a tool to pay for travel without using personal funds. This allows you to keep your personal finances separate from your government transactions. The travel charge card also provides a means to obtain cash travel advances quickly and efficiently. As more items, such as hotel expenses, are “centrally billed,” the “individually billed” portion of your charge card bill, which you are responsible for paying, will become smaller. Centrally billed items are billed directly to, and paid by, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and show on your statement as “memo” items. Individually billed items are those items that you must pay before the statement due date.

**2. Q - What must I use the travel charge card for?**

A - The travel charge card must be used to purchase your own transportation tickets, lodging, rental cars, and fuel for rental cars while on official travel, unless the travel charge card is not accepted or an exemption has been granted. You must not use it to pay travel-related expenses for others.

**3. Q - Is use of the travel charge card mandatory for house hunting and relocation travel?**

A - Use of the travel charge card is mandatory for house hunting and en route travel if you are leaving one BLM office and moving to another BLM office. Since house hunting and en route travel expenses are chargeable to the gaining organization, you must make sure to adjust the charges by changing the default charge code on your statement to reflect your new office.

You should not use your BLM-issued travel charge card for relocation expenses when you are transferring to another Federal agency. If you are moving to another Federal agency, you should contact the gaining organization regarding its charge card program policies and procedures. In some cases, your gaining organization may be able to issue you a charge card to be used for some of your relocation expenses. Please note that you should not use your travel charge card to purchase fuel for any privately owned vehicle. When you leave BLM for another Federal agency, be certain that your BLM charge card account is canceled by your Agency/Organization Program Coordinator (A/OPC) and your card is destroyed.

4. **Q - Can I get an exemption from mandatory use of the charge card?**

A - As stated in Financial Administration Memorandum 2000-010 (Attachment 2), you must prepare an exemption request that fully describes the extenuating circumstances beyond your control that prevent you from using the Government-sponsored travel charge card. You must submit the exemption request to the Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management, through your immediate supervisor and your State/Center Director. If the exemption is approved, it will be returned to you and a copy will be forwarded to the DOI's Office of Financial Management. The Office of Financial Management will report all approved exemptions to the GSA within 30 days.

5. **Q - What happens if I chose not to obtain a travel charge card or use it?**

A - Obtaining and using the travel charge card is not optional except in extenuating circumstances beyond your control. Your failure to obtain and use the card may result in disciplinary action.

6. **Q - What happens if I don't have a travel charge card because it was suspended or canceled by the Bank of America because my account is delinquent?**

A - If your account is suspended or canceled because of your failure to pay undisputed charges, you will be required to finance any official travel, with the exception of transportation. You will be reimbursed for your valid out-of-pocket expenses after you have prepared and submitted a travel voucher. Transportation tickets can be purchased by your organization and charged on the Corporate Charge Card. Disciplinary action may be initiated if not having a travel charge card affects your ability to perform your job.

7. **Q - If my card is canceled because of delinquency, can a new card be issued to me?**

A - Yes. The Bank of America, however, has the final decision on whether they want to reissue the card or not. The Bank of America will not consider reissuing a new card until you have paid all undisputed delinquent amounts, you have obtained approval from your supervisor, and your A/OPC asks the Bank of America to reissue a charge card to you.

8. **Q - Do Bank of America delinquencies affect a cardholder's credit record?**

A - If your account becomes 96 days' delinquent, your account will be canceled. If your account is canceled, Bank of America can report this information to the credit bureau. If your account is not paid in full before it becomes 210 days' delinquent, your account is placed in "charge off" status. Once information is reported to the credit bureau, information will remain on your credit bureau reports for at least 7 years.

**9. Q - Can the Bank of America run a credit report prior to re-issuance of a card to me if my card was canceled because of delinquency?**

A - Yes. The Bank of America, under the terms of their contract, can run a credit report prior to re-issuance of a card if your card was canceled because of delinquency. Based on the results of the credit report, the Bank of America will determine if they will reissue you a travel charge card.

**10. Q - If I do not have a card, or if my card has been suspended or canceled, and I feel I have a hardship in financing my own trip, how do I apply for a travel advance?**

A - Your request for a travel advance must be sent to the Assistant Director, Business and Fiscal Resources (WO-800) through your State/Center Director. The request must answer the following questions:

- If your card was suspended or canceled because it was delinquent, what actions have you taken to get your card reactivated or obtain a new one?
- What is the specific hardship that you will encounter if you do not get a travel advance?

**11. Q - Will disciplinary action be initiated if I have made unauthorized purchases with my charge card or if my account is delinquent?**

A - Formal disciplinary actions will be considered if you use your travel charge card for other than official purposes. If your account is delinquent, payroll action to assist Bank of America in collecting the past due amounts, rather than disciplinary action, may be taken for the first or second offense. Disciplinary action may be taken for subsequent offenses if your ability to perform your assigned duties has been affected by card suspension or cancellation.

**12. Q - Where can I find guidance on disciplinary actions related to misuse of the charge card?**

A - Guidance on disciplinary actions related to misusing the charge card can be found in the DOI Handbook on Charges and Penalty Selection for Disciplinary and Adverse Actions. You can find additional information on the above at the following websites:

- DOI Handbook - <http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/tabpnfn3.htm>
- Federal Employee Standards of Conduct - <http://www.doi.gov/hrm/pmanager/general.html>

**13. Q - If I know I will be on travel for an extended period of time (i.e., fire duty) and will not be available to pay my charge card bill, is there any way I can keep my card from being suspended or canceled?**

A - Yes. If your account is in good standing (i.e., not delinquent), and if you will be away from the office on official business for extended periods (i.e., on fire duty) and unable to file travel vouchers on time to receive reimbursement, you may be designated a “mission critical” employee. The request to be designated as a “mission critical” employee must be approved by your supervisor and BLM’s Assistant Director, Business and Fiscal Resources. If your account is over 90 days’ past due and mission critical designation is needed, you must obtain approval of the Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget, in accordance with the procedures in the DOI Integrated Charge Card Program Guidelines. Contact your A/OPC for assistance.

**14. Q - If I am designated as a “mission critical” employee, will that stop the collection (salary offset) process?**

A - The Bank of America will not initiate the collection process if your account is designated as mission critical. However, late fees will be charged to your account if your account becomes delinquent 120 days or more. You must pay these late fees unless the Bank of America has waived them. The Bank of America may waive the late fees if they receive a request with an explanation as to why your account is delinquent. Your request, including an explanation of the circumstances that resulted in late fees being assessed, must be sent to your A/OPC through your supervisor. Your A/OPC will forward your request to the Bureau Charge Card Program Coordinator at the BLM National Business Center for processing.

**15. Q - If I leave BLM and I have an outstanding balance on my charge card account, will my final pay be affected?**

A - If the Bank of America has initiated salary offset to collect past due amounts, the salary offset will be applied to your final pay. However, in order for the BLM to withhold additional funds from your final pay when you leave BLM, the Bank of America would have to have a court order requiring BLM to withhold money to pay all or a portion of the total amount owed. When an employee leaves BLM, the Bank of America is notified of the employee’s home address. If the employee fails to pay, the Bank of America may begin a collection process with the individual and the information may be referenced on the individual’s personal credit history.

**16. Q - What is the requirement for the reviewing official’s (supervisor’s) review of individual charges?**

A - If you are a reviewing official, you should review the monthly card statements and receipts of all employees who have a charge card. This includes employees that have access to the travel/fleet, travel/purchase/fleet, or the uniform business lines. When performing your review, you should:

- Review reconciled statements, receipts, and sales drafts to ensure charges are valid and for official purposes.
- Ensure that centrally billed items are not included on a travel voucher.
- Ensure that cardholders reconcile their accounts within 5 business days of receiving their statements and that the cardholder has signed the statement.
- Validate cardholder statements within 5 business days of receiving them from the cardholders and sign the statement.
- Take appropriate action if a cardholder misuses their card or fails to pay individually billed items, as identified elsewhere in this document.

**17. Q - If I am a supervisor and am notified that an employee's charge card account is delinquent, what action should I take?**

A - You should meet with the employee to determine the reason for the delinquency. The employee should be counseled on the mandatory use requirement, the need to keep their account current, and the possible results of having a delinquent account (i.e., suspension of account, cancellation of account, impact on one's credit history, collection of delinquent amounts by withholding salary, and disciplinary action). If the delinquency is a reoccurring problem, disciplinary action should be considered. You must contact your Servicing Personnel Office for advice and assistance before initiating any formal action or before issuing any notices to the employee.

**18. Q - If I am a supervisor, what are my responsibilities in the case of suspected misuse/abuse (excluding fraud) of the charge card by an employee?**

A - You should consider formal disciplinary action if, after gathering all relevant facts, there is evidence that the charge card was used for unofficial purposes. Before any formal action is taken and before issuing any notice to the employee, you must contact the Servicing Personnel Office to ensure that all the necessary requirements are satisfied. Additional guidance may be found in the DOI's Handbook on Charges and Penalty Selection for Disciplinary and Adverse Action.

**19. Q - If I am a supervisor, what are my responsibilities in the case of suspected fraud involving the use of the charge card by an employee?**

A - You must contact your Servicing Personnel Office for advice and assistance prior to initiating any actions in the case of suspected fraud. If, following discussions with the employee and a review of factual information regarding the incident, you have reason to believe that the misuse was fraudulent in nature (i.e., intentional misuse resulting in loss to the Government), you must also contact the Office of Inspector General for guidance and referral.